

Early Decision and Early Action

If you find a college that seems a perfect fit, applying early may be a good idea. Early decision and early action plans allow you to apply early (usually in November) and get an admission decision from the college well before the usual spring notification date. You know by December or January whether you have been accepted at the first-choice college.

Sometimes, students who apply under these plans have a better chance of acceptance than they would through the regular admission process. These plans are also good for colleges because they get students who really want to go to the college to commit early in the process.

Early Decision vs. Early Action

You should understand the differences between early decision and early action before sending in applications. Keep in mind, also, that the rules may vary somewhat by college. You can check with the College's Admissions counselor to get an understanding of the early applicant's rights and obligations. Below are some important facts about the three types of early-application plan.

Early decision plans are binding. You agree to attend the college if accepted and if the college offers an adequate financial aid package. Although you can apply to only one college for early decision, applying to other colleges through the regular admission process is allowed. If you are accepted by the first-choice college early, all other applications must be withdrawn.

Early action plans are similar to early decision plans, but are not binding. If accepted, you can choose to commit to the college immediately, or wait until the spring. Under these plans, you may also apply early action to other colleges. Usually, candidates have until the late spring to let the college know their decision.

Single-choice early action is a new option offered by a few colleges. This plan works the same way as other early action plans, but candidates may not apply early (either early action or early decision) to any other college. You can still apply to other colleges under regular decision plans and are not required to give a final answer to the early-application college until the regular decision deadline.

Application Type	Binding	Can Apply Early to Other Colleges	Can Apply to Other Colleges Under Regular Admission
Early Decision	Yes	No	Yes
Early Action	No	Yes	Yes
Single-Choice Early Action	No	No	Yes

Should I Apply Under One of These Plans?

You should apply under an early decision or early action plan only if you are very sure about wanting to attend a particular college. You should not apply under an early decision or early action plan if you are planning to weigh offers and financial aid packages from several colleges later in the spring. Also, you shouldn't apply early if it would be beneficial to have more senior year work to show a college.

Which Colleges Offer Early Plans?

More than 400 colleges offer an early decision plan, an early action plan, or both. Use the College Board's College Search (<http://collegesearch.collegeboard.com/search/index.jsp>) to look up each college you are interested in and see if it offers these options.

A Last Word of Advice

In the fall, it may seem appealing to get the college decision over with, but you may want to keep options open during your senior year, while learning more about colleges and personal preferences. On the other hand, you may be confident of thriving at a certain college. If so, you are the type of student early decision was created for.

Early Decision and Early Action Calendar

If you are even considering the option of early decision or early action, here are the steps you need to take:

Junior Year

January-May

- Take college admission tests, such as the SAT®.
- Visit colleges during spring break.

May-June

- Take SAT Subject Tests™ to demonstrate your knowledge and achievement in specific subject areas and to help you stand out on your college applications.
- Work hard and keep up good grades.

Senior Year

September-October

- Work on and complete applications.
- Get teachers to write letters of recommendation.
- File early decision or early action applications according to college deadlines and procedures.
- Take the SAT if necessary (Note: October is the last test date that makes scores available in time for early decision and early action programs).
- If necessary, register for CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®
(<https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/prf/index.jsp>)

November

- File any early applications by the college deadline.
- Follow up with teacher recommendations.
- Work on regular-decision applications as a backup in case you're not accepted early decision or early action.
- File the PROFILE and any other college-based financial aid forms that may be required of early decision candidates.

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